

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9815

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

CINCPAC

SECDEF WASHDC

S E C R E T SINGAPORE 4869

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, MASS, SN

SUBJECT: MILITARY ASSISTANCE AND REGIONAL SECURITY

REF: A. MANILA 13736; B. JAKARTA 14582; C. KUALA LUMPUR 5489

1. SUMMARY. ALTHOUGH CLOSER COOPERATION BY ASEAN GOVERNMENTS TO PROMOTE REGIONAL SECURITY IS OBVIOUSLY IN US INTEREST, WE THINK IT BEST TO LEAVE PRINCIPAL INITIATIVE FOR ACHIEVING SULK COOPERATION TO GOVERNMENTS OF THE REGION. ROLE US CAN PLAY IN PROMOTING REGIONAL SECURITY IS AT BEST MARGINAL, AND COULD BE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE UNLESS WE ARE EXCEPTIONALLY

CAREFUL. SINGAPORE PROVIDES EXCELLENT EXAMPLE OF SENSITIVITIES AND DIFFICULTIES WE CONFRONT IN THIS AREA.

GOS IS DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT SECURITY OF THE REGION AND IS PREPARED TO COOPERATE TO LIMITED EXTENT ON BI-

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RHLATERAL BASIS WITH ITS NEIGHBORS IN EXCHANGING INTELLIGENCE

ON COMMUNIST
SUBVERSION AND IN MAKING BILATERAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE PURCHASE AND REPAIR OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT. HOWEVER, ITS SUSPICIONS OF ITS IMMEDIATE NEIGHBORS ARE SO GREAT
IT WOULD RESIST AND RESENT EFFORTS BY
US TO PROMOTE REGIONAL MILITARY PLANNING. END
SUMMARY.

2. FROM ASEAN'S INCEPTION IN 1967 US HAS TAKEN HANDS OFF POSTURE ON GROUND THAT ASEAN WOULD ONLY ACQUIRE GENUINE COHESION AND MEANINGFUL STRENGTH IF IT WERE ALLOWED TO DEVELOP IN ITS OWN WAY WITHOUT ANY STIMULATION, GUIDANCE OR NUDGING FROM US. IN EMBASSY'S JUDGMENT THIS APPROACH HAS PAID OFF AND IS STILL VALID.
INITIALLY, ASEAN GOVERNMENTS INSISTED THAT ASEAN WAS PURELY ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL BODY AND THAT IT HAD NEITHER POLITICAL NOR SECURITY IMPLICATIONS OR OBJECTIVES.
SINCE THEN ASEAN HAS GRADUALLY TAKEN ON POLITICAL OVERTONES AND MEETINGS OF FOREIGN MINISTERS OF ASEAN GOVERNMENTS ARE REGULARLY USED FOR POLITICAL CONSULTATION.

3. TODAY, PROBABLY ALL OF
THE ASEAN MEMBER GOVERNMENTS
WOULD ADMIT THAT ASEAN IS A USEFUL POLITICAL FORUM,
BUT WOULD STILL STOUTLY REJECT ANY THOUGHT THAT
ASEAN SHOULD BECOME A SECURITY ORGANIZATION OR THAT IT
HAS ANY SECURITY IMPLICATIONS. NONETHELESS, THERE ARE
INTELLIGENCE REPORTS THAT SECURITY MATTERS ARE OCCASIONALLY
DISCUSSED ON A BILATERAL BASIS IN THE CORRIDORS AT
MEETINGS OF THE ASEAN FOREIGN MINISTERS.

4. HESITANCY OF MEMBER GOVERNMENTS TO MOVE MORE
RAPIDLY TOWARDS COORDINATING SECURITY PLANNING IS
PROBABLY ATTRIBUTABLE TO FOLLOWING FACTORS:

A. CONCERN THAT ANY ORGANIZATION THAT HAD TOO
MUCH OF A SECURITY FLAVOR ABOUT IT MIGHT ATTRACT HOSTILE
REACTION OF COMMUNIST CHINA AND NORTH VIETNAM.

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B. TRADITIONAL ANTAGONISMS AND FEARS AMONG MEMBER
STATES TOWARDS EACH OTHER, E.J., MALAYSIA/PHILIPPINE
DISPUTE OVER SABAH, SINGAPORE SUSPICIONS OF MALAYSIAN
AND I AONESIAN INTENTIONS AND MEMORIES OF CONFRONTATION.
IN VIEW OF THESE FACTORS, WE THINK IT BEST TO LET
ASEAN GOVERNMENTS MOVE TOWARD GREATER SECURITY COOPERATION
AT THEIR OWN PACE AND WITHOUT ANY LEAD FROM THE
U.S. SINCE INDONESIA'S SIZE AND RESOURCES MAKE IT

THE POTENTIAL LEADER OF ASEAN, BELIEVE IT BEST TO LET
GOI TAKE LEAD IN PROMOTING REGIONAL SECURITY. SO FAR
IT HAS MOVED CAUTIOUSLY AND INTELLIGENTLY WITH DUE
REGARD TO NEIGHBORS' SENSITIVITIES AS DESCRIBED
PARAS 3 AND 4 REF B.

5. GOS ATTITUDE TOWARDS COORDINATED PLANNING FOR
REGIONAL SECURITY ILLUSTRATES DIFFICULTIES
AND SENSITIVITIES INVOLVED IN THIS AREA. GOS
IS DEEPLY CONCERNED OVER
THE SECURITY OF THE REGION AND
IS ANXIOUS TO ENGAGE IN BILATERAL ARRANGEMENTS WITH
SUCH NEIGHBORS AS TAIWAN, VIETNAM, THAILAND AND THE
PHILIPPINES IN SALES/PURCHASES AND REPAIRS OF MILITARY
EQUIPMENT OF REGIONAL MANUFACTURE, SOME MILITARY TRAINING
IN THAILAND AND TAIWAN AND LIMITED INTELLIGENCE
EXCHANGES. HOWEVER, IT IS CLEARLY UNWILLING TO COORDINATE
ITS MILITARY PLANNING WITH ITS NEIGHBORS, OR JOIN IN
JOINT TRAINING EXERCISES WITH MALAYSIA AND INDONESIA.
WITHIN FIVE POWER DEFENSE ARRANGEMENT UK AND AUSTRALIA
HAVE COMPLETELY STRUCK OUT IN THEIR EFFORTS TO PERSUADE
SINGAPORE AND MALAYSIA TO DEVELOP COMPATIBLE WEAPONS
SYSTEMS AND COORDINATE AIR DEFENSE PLANNING. BASIC
PROBLEM HERE IS THAT SINGAPORE REGARDS MALAYSIA AND TO
LESSER EXTENT INDONESIA AS SIGNIFICANT POTENTIAL
THREATS TO ITS SECURITY AND IS THEREFORE MORE INTERESTED
IN DEVELOPING CREDIBLE MILITARY BRE
ERRENT#THAN IN
COOPERATING WITH THEM ON DEFENSE PLANNING OR TRAINING.
UNTIL THESE BASIC SUSPICIONS ARE REMOVED
AND POLITICAL RELATIONS WITH ITS NEIGHBORS BECOME MUCH
WARMER, WE SHOULD NOT EXPECT VERY MUCH POSITIVE MOGK-
MENT BY SINGAPORE TOWARD CLOSER MILITARY COOPERATION.

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6. PRESUMABLY IN COUNTRIES WHERE WE HAVE MILITARY
ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS, THERE IS MARGINAL ROLE US CAN
PLAY IN PREVENTING REGIONAL SECURITY COOPERATION
SUCH AS ENCOURAGING DEVELOPMENT OF COMPATIBLE WEAPONS
SYSTEMS AND ARRANGING TRAINING SESSIONS AND CONFERENCES
WHERE MILITARY PLANNERS FROM VARIOUS COUNTRIES IN THE
REGIOCTCAN GET TOGETHER. IN SINGAPORE WHERE
THERE IS NO MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM BUT WHERE DAO
ADVICE IS OCCASIONALLY SOUGHT, THERE MAY ALSO BE OCCASIONAL
OPPORTUNITIES TO INFLUENCE GOS MILITARY PROCUREMENT
DECISIONS AND PLANNING. HOWEVER, THIS CAN ONLY BE DONE
IN MOST INDIRECT MANNER AND WITH CAUTIOUS DEFERENCE TO
GOS POLITICAL SUSPICIONS OF ITS NEIGHBORS.

7. EMBASSY CONCURS WITH APPROACH SUGGESTED IN
PARA 3 REF C. CRONK

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